

## VIETNAM POLICY: THE SEARCH FOR DOMINANCE

1. The present situation in Vietnam is uncertain. On the one hand, the emergence of Thieu as an effective political leader, the continuous favorable military trend, the increasing numbers of Chieu Hoi, the recent HES results, the growing effectiveness of the RVNAF and the GVN, the casualties and war weariness of the enemy, the increasing reliance by the enemy on PAVN units and personnel all argue that things are going well. Taken at face value these factors support the notion that we are winning, literally winning, unless we throw things away in the negotiations. But there are negative factors at work as well: the frighteningly high ARVN desertion rate, the continuous effectiveness of the VC in the villages -- low-scale military and terrorist activity coupled with political organization, the depth and solidity of enemy organization, the continuous availability of sanctuary, the possibility of political deterioration of the GVN particularly as negotiations proceed, the continual reliance in SVN on in-group leadership rather than on a broadly based national government, friendly war-weariness. On balance, I would give slightly greater weight to the favorable factors -- but attach only a reasonable probability to that judgment.

*Phoenix*

2. Present U.S. policy lacks domestic support and provides perverse incentives to both the GVN and the enemy.

- a. The present cost of the war in dollars and in blood is higher than Congress or the U.S. public will support. A more acceptable rationale for the war might have helped earlier, but it is too late now to generate support for the present level of U.S. effort.



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A reduction in the cost of the war will, however, reopen the door to funding an acceptable rationale for a continuing U.S. effort.

- b. Given the chance of a collapse of U.S. domestic support for the war, the enemy has a strong incentive to keep it going and take everything. Clifford, McGovern, Young have all shown how strong the political pressure is going to be to phase out the U.S. effort.
- c. The GVN reads the tea leaves just the other way: Nixon's election confirms the durability of U.S. support. The GVN realizes it has to continue to be at least nominally effective, but sees no urgent need for military or political reform. They aren't scared enough yet that the U.S. will pick up its marbles and go home.
- d. Paradoxically, present U.S. policy weakens the GVN politically: the knowledge that U.S. soldiers are slaughtering Vietnamese causes anger and shame among important elements of the SVN population and gives the enemy a powerful political weapon.

3. Irreversibility is a problem for the enemy as well as for us. It's hard for us to resume bombing after a pause or put back troops once we've taken them out. But the enemy has the same problem: technically and politically it will be difficult for NVN to reintroduce PAVN forces once they are pulled out, or to resume random rocketing of cities, or, more generally, to rekindle village support and enthusiasm after a tactical withdrawal of military forces.



4. An appropriate U.S. policy today should include a significant staged unilateral reduction in U.S. forces, limitation of negotiations to mutual withdrawal of forces, revision of the rules of engagement for U.S. forces in Vietnam, and a reduction in the size and visibility of U.S. involvement in pacification.

- a. An initial significant unilateral reduction in the number of U.S. troops in South Vietnam would lay the basis for the re-establishment of domestic political support for continuous U.S. support of the GVN, reduce enemy belief in the inevitability of the collapse of U.S. political support for Vietnam involvement, and show the GVN we mean it when we say the burden is going to be shifted more to them. How large, how soon, and what kind of initial force reduction is hard to say without greater technical competence than I possess but the principles should be: large enough to have a significant political impact here and in SVN, as much as possible given its size, as soon as possible and announced by the end of January. What about 100,000 men by June 30?
- b. Further troop reductions should be programmed to be carried out in the absence of any NVN escalation and the GVN but not NVN should be told they are coming. The full mutual withdrawal of forces (from Laos and Cambodia as well as SVN) should be the negotiating issue for us. No unilateral troop reductions should be made below the level necessary to sustain (not win) the war, but we should be prepared to accept mutual withdrawal if the NVN are.



- c. U.S. fire power should be used largely in support of troop operations and M&I artillery for the in-country air strikes reduced (except for B-52 raids on enemy troop concentrations). Rules of engagement should be tightened and monitored to reduce civilian casualties. All crop destruction operations should be stopped entirely and defoliation operations held to a tight and monitored minimum. There is abundant evidence that the military pay-off from present use of U.S. firepower is minimal, and equally abundant that the negative political impact is large both here and in SVN.
- d. Pacification isn't important enough to justify the presence of so many so visible Americans all over South Vietnam. CORDS should be greatly reduced in size and a return made to an advisory role. The present numbers of Americans don't accomplish much anyway, and what they do accomplish is often not very important. But they are very visible both to reporters and to the South Vietnamese. They are an important factor in the increase in Vietnam about "real" American intents and make good propaganda for the enemy. They also implicate the United States in every aspect of the GVN and make it impossible for the U.S. Congress and public to judge GVN performance by the standards appropriate developing nation. There is little need in this memo to add a caveat about protecting essential anti-infrastructure operations. The U.S. Mission in Saigon will throw up every kind of argument even against pruning, whereas cutting is required.



5. The above general lines of policy are dominant. Skilfully carried out they preserve the chances for "winning" but they don't put the new Administration on the same old hook. They would put the monkey where it belongs -- on the GVN. If our optimists are right (and I'm inclined to think they are) the political respite here will give the GVN breathing room to prove them so -- and may be the only way to do so. If the pessimists are right, the GVN will hang -- but hang itself not be hanged by us. And this is the key to the success of the policy: the announced objective must be to provide the support necessary to offset external military support for the enemy but no more. As an important corollary, all announcements regarding U.S. troop reductions should be made by Thieu and associated with increased GVN capability for "self-help." The ultimate goal is the creation of a GVN and RVNAF capable of handling even PAVN -- and this is not a ridiculous goal for the next few years.

6. MAC/V cooperation is essential, but impossible if "attrition" is still seen as the path to "victory." Only with an explicit policy other than military victory as soon as possible can MAC/V be induced to do the necessary planning and staffing involved. As long as military victory as soon as possible is MAC/V's goal, MAC/V won't be able to regear and rethink the problem. Once reduction of U.S. costs is made an equally important objective, and the rationale for it persuasively communicated to MAC/V, the needed can be achieved: U.S. troops protected, RVNAF supported, the enemy punished. In the absence of clear signals there will be chaos.